

SENATE RESOLUTION 134

By Akbari

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Dr. Donald Paul Pinkel.

WHEREAS, the members of this legislative body were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Donald Paul Pinkel, who developed a successful treatment for childhood leukemia; and

WHEREAS, the first chief executive and medical director of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Dr. Pinkel was a highly respected physician, dedicated scientist, and lifelong educator who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Donald Pinkel was born in Buffalo, New York, on September 7, 1926, to Lawrence and Anne Richardson Pinkel; and

WHEREAS, after joining the Navy in 1944, Dr. Pinkel was sent to Cornell University as part of the Navy's V-12 program, which gave college coursework to promising recruits; having developed an interest in biology and medicine, he returned home and graduated from Canisius College in Buffalo in 1947 and the Buffalo School of Medicine in 1951, covering some of the costs by joining the Army Reserve Medical Command; and

WHEREAS, he quickly found his calling in pediatrics, childhood cancer in particular, which was then considered to be an unproductive field of research; after holding a series of residencies and fellowships in pediatrics and oncology across the Northeast, Dr. Pinkel was recalled to active service during the Korean War and sent to a military hospital outside Boston, Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS, a polio epidemic was in full swing in the region at the time, and Dr. Pinkel, overworked as the hospital's only pediatrician, soon caught the disease himself; it took him a year to recover—a recovery that came, coincidentally, just as Jonas Salk's new polio vaccine

was being rolled out, which had turned what had once been a scourge of childhood into a largely preventable disease; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Donald Pinkel dreamed of doing the same with leukemia; acute lymphocytic leukemia, a type of cancer that overwhelms the body with misshapen white blood cells, was once the number-one cause of death of children in the U.S. between the ages of three and fifteen; the disease was responsible for at least 2,000 deaths a year and had a ninety-six-percent fatality rate; and

WHEREAS, during his rehabilitation from polio, Dr. Pinkel worked with the famed oncologist Dr. Sidney Farber in Boston, then returned to Buffalo after being recruited to develop a pediatrics department at Roswell Park Cancer Institute, where he established research and clinical programs and was an early member of the national Acute Leukemia Group B; and

WHEREAS, in 1961, Dr. Donald Pinkel was recruited to Memphis to lead St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which was still under construction; with an unyielding hope and determination that childhood leukemia could be vanquished, he accepted the position; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Pinkel quickly pursued a radically different course of treatment than what was then standard; instead of one drug or treatment at a time, he would use them all, pushing patients' bodies to the limit in a quest to drive the cancer into remission; and

WHEREAS, when the patients were healthy enough, he and his team would continue treatment with radiation and chemotherapy drugs to attack places where Dr. Pinkel suspected the cancer might be hiding; and

WHEREAS, it was a grueling process that would go on for months, even years, but by 1968, Dr. Pinkel's regimen, which he called Total Therapy, was achieving remarkable results; a decade later, after continual refinements, the five-year-survival rate had increased to eighty percent; today, it stands at ninety-four percent; and

WHEREAS, during Dr. Donald Pinkel's tenure at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the institution became a world leader in pediatric hematology and oncology, which Dr. Pinkel always attributed to the staff, patients, and families at St. Jude; and

WHEREAS, beyond his many medical accomplishments, Dr. Pinkel helped pioneer the racial integration of staff and patients in Memphis through his work at St. Jude; he also launched a program to provide families with supplemental nutrition, which became a model for the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, known as W.I.C.; and

WHEREAS, after leaving St. Jude in 1974, Dr. Pinkel went on to develop pediatric oncology programs at hospitals in Wisconsin, California, Pennsylvania, and Texas; in 1994, he retired to California, where he taught for many years in the Biology Department of California Polytechnic University; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Donald Pinkel was inducted into the Tennessee Health Care Hall of Fame in 2017; that same year, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital named its new research tower in his honor, a testament to his persistence in the face of what almost everyone else believed to be an impossible task; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Pinkel is survived by his wife, Cathryn Howarth; six daughters, Rebecca Anthor, Nancy Pinkel, Mary Pinkel, Noelle Greene, Sara Pinkel and Ruth Pinkel; three sons, John, Thomas, and Michael; his sister, Eileen Pinkel; sixteen grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, he was preceded in death by his son, Christopher; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Donald Pinkel leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that we should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we honor the memory and celebrate the life of Dr. Donald Paul Pinkel, whose remarkable achievements in the treatment of childhood leukemia have saved the lives of countless numbers of children.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Dr. Pinkel.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.